

Political Integration in Brazil: A Possible Key to Contemporary Alternatives

Simon Schwartzman

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The aim of this very brief paper is to suggest how the study of the historical process of political integration in Brazil can be useful for the understanding of some political alternatives the country is facing today. These alternatives refer to the type of governmental organization and forms of political participation the country is to establish in order to allow for the values of social and economic development, social justice and personal freedom. What do they have to do with the country's history of regional integration?¹

What is remarkable about the country's political history is its ability to remain as an integrated polity covering more than eight millions square kilometers, while the Spanish Empire disintegrated in twenty-odd independent nations. The colonial experience, however, lasting from 1500 to 1822, was not one of a fully integrated and centralized administration² In 1534 the country was divided into twelve independent and hereditary captaincies, above which a Governador Geral (general governor) was later established. From 1621 to 1774 the country was divided into two estados (states), one including the captaincies of Maranhão e Pará, called State of Maranhão, and the other, known as State of Brazil, the remaining ones. From the eleven captaincies of Brazil, five still had a private donatário, or Captain, in 1640, while the remaining ones had been acquired back by the Portuguese Crown.

¹ For a conceptual discussion of this process of integration, see my paper "Regional Contrasts within a Continental-Scale State: Brazil", in S. Rokkan and S. N. Eisenstadt, *Building States and Nations: Models, Analyzes and Data Across Three Worlds* (Sage Publications, vol II, 1973). See also *São Paulo e o Estado Nacional*, (São Paulo: Difusão Europeia do Livro, forthcoming).

² For an overview of the Brazilian colonial settlement and institutions, specially in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, see. C.R. Boxer, *Salvador de Sá and the Struggle for Brazil and Angola* (University of London: The Athlone Press, 1952).

While the sugar industry developed in the Brazilian northeast in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century, Portugal related mostly with that area, leaving the South more or less on its own. A prosperous and fairly independent settlement developed where is now São Paulo, from where expeditions departed to the countryside in search of gold and Indian slaves; a military establishment was created in front of Buenos Aires in early eighteenth century; and, when gold was finally discovered in Minas Gerais at that time, Brazil's capital moved finally from Bahia to Rio de Janeiro, in order to better control the newfound richness.

One might speculate that one of the main reasons the country did not break into several independent units was that, when independence came in 1822, no other region of the country was powerful or prosperous enough to compete with the city of Rio de Janeiro, which had benefitted for almost a century from the administration of the gold flux between the mining areas in the hinterland and Europe. The Brazilian independence is preceded by the arrival of the Portuguese Royal family and upper-level administration in 1808, under British protection from the invading French. In 1822 the heir of the Portuguese Crown becomes the Emperor of Brazil, getting the support from the Portuguese squad in Brazil at the time; and thus a heavily organized civilian and military bureaucracy remained running the country, with no native or "criollo" group or region strong enough to effectively check its power.

The subsequent period was not without tensions, and the country experienced a series of civil wars that represented the efforts of the several regions to acquire independence from the central state. The main focus of resistance was in the Southern frontier, where more than a century of contacts and conflicts with the Spanish have provided the area with autonomous military skills and organization. The first Emperor was not able to prevail for long, and left the country close to disintegration in 1831. By 1840, however, his son was firmly established as the second Emperor of Brazil, and the country's territorial integrity was not to come into question again.

This very short historical overview helps to establish a few points. First, the country's political integration is not the result of a federation of independent regions, but on the contrary, the consequence of the imposition of a centralizing colonial administration upon

a few independent-minded regions. Second, the most serious attempt for regional independence came from the region that had established a military tradition on its own, in the southern wars. Other military campaigns were to be held in the nineteenth century against Rosas in Argentina and Lopes in Paraguay. These wars were fought mainly with southern troops, keeping alive the military traditions of the state of Rio Grande³. Their insubordination towards the central government remained strong, and was only reduced when, with the turn of the century, they came to the very center of national politics, thus becoming an additional factor in favor of the country's regional integration and political centralization.

We have already two important components which contributed to the country's centralization, the Portuguese-inherited civilian bureaucracy and Navy, and the army, created in great part by the Southern wars, which exchanged local autonomy for national influence and power. A third component was the decaying economic and political elites of the Northern states, which had been able to survive the economic crises of the sugar and gold economy through a process of progressive subordination to the central administration⁴.

What could confront this convergence of factors and interests? Only a very powerful and money-producing economic activity in a previously marginal area. This was exactly what happened in São Paulo, which became in the early twenty century the center of a booming coffee economy, after about one hundred fifty years of stagnation and isolation which followed the establishment of the Portuguese' control of the gold mines. With the emergence of São Paulo as an autonomous and independent force, more closely related to the international economy than to the Brazilian political center, the issue of regional integration or autonomy reappears in terms of political federation vs. political

³ See Joseph L. Love, *Rio Grande do Sul and Brazilian Regionalism, 1882-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), which provides a historical overview of the military and separatist experience of that area

⁴ For an analysis of regional politics in the Brazilian Northeast, see Aspásia Alcântara de Camargo, *Brésil Nord-Est - Mouvement Paysans et Crise Populiste*, Université de Paris, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Centro d'Études des Mouvements Sociaux, 1973.

centralization⁵. In the late nineteenth century the country becomes the "Republic of the United States of Brazil", with a political regime which reflected the balance of power between the centralization and decentralization tendencies in the country, but which left São Paulo very much on its own to pursue its specific interests. The Federation was considerably reduced in 1930 and abolished from 1937 to 1945, with Getúlio Vargas' *Estado Novo*, and again considerably reduced when Brazil ceased to be a "United States" to become a "Federalist Republic", in 1966.

Which are the contemporary political issues that this historical background is supposed to illuminate?

First, there is the question of political representation. Representational politics supposes the existence of autonomous, inner-directed interest groups, whichever may be their basis of identification - economic, ethnic, linguistic, religious, etc. The preceding historical overview suggests, however, that the regional elites in the Brazilian Center, Northeast and South were less concerned with the representation of their interests in the political center than with their access to positions of power and prestige in a centralized political regime⁶. Local efforts for autonomy tended thus to be easily *co-opted* by the political center or suppressed by the local elites with the help of the central government⁷.

This leads to a second and related aspect, which has to do with the nature of the political activity. A political regime based on centralization and co-optation tends towards excessive bureaucratization, piece-meal distributionist decision-making and patronage, while representational politics tends to be more responsive to political constituents and

⁵ For the relationships between São Paulo and the country's central political regime in its period of industrial growth, see Warren Dean, *The Industrialization of São Paulo, 1880-1945* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1969). For the relationships between São Paulo and the international economy, see Joseph L. Love, "External Financing and Domestic Politics: The Case of São Paulo, Brazil, 1889-1937", in Robert E. Scott (ed), *Latin American Modernization Problems* (University of Illinois Press, 1973, pp. 236-259).

⁶ See my paper on "Economic Development and Patrimonial Politics", presented to the IX World Congress of IPSA in Montreal, Canada, August 1973, and published as "Desenvolvimento Econômico e Política Patrimonial" (Rio de Janeiro: *Dados*, 10, 1973).

⁷ This suppression was especially ruthless against the milenaristic movements that tended to occur intermittently in the Brazilian Northeast. See, among others, Ralph Della Cava, *Miracle at Juazeiro* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1970), and the classic from Euclides da Cunha, *Os Sertões* (translated as *Rebellion in the Backlands*, Chicago Univ. Press, 1944).

therefore more explicit and strait forward in the attainment of the government's goals and policies.

These two aspects contributed to divide the country into two ideological cleavages and political styles. One is centralizing, co-optational, overly bureaucratized and patrimonialistic in the relationships between the politician and the state; the other is decentralizing, representational, and ideologically more explicit. The first corresponds to the historically dominant central government of Brazil, while the second corresponds to the economically dominant but politically somewhat marginal state of São Paulo.

This type of polarity can easily lead to the notion that the first is the more traditional, underdeveloped, backward and inefficient part of the country, while the second is the more modern, efficient, and progressive one; and the differences in per-capita income, education, welfare, and so on, between the São Paulo area and the rest seem to confirm this perspective.

This picture starts to get blurred, however, when one considers the third political issue, which is related to the *role of the central administration in the promotion of social and economic development*. What one sees here is that the central state has, at least since 1937, continuously implemented some policy of social and economic planning, while suffering the liberal, non-interventionist criticism and opposition from the Paulista elites. It is easy to see how this kind of opposition against the central government is not restricted to its patrimonialistic, often irrational and inefficient administration, but against the whole notion of central coordination and planning. Seen from this light, this opposition appears as a latecomer version of nineteenth century liberalism that flourishes in a privileged *enclave* in an otherwise underdeveloped patrimonial state.

The problems of political integration that Brazil faces today are basically one of bringing together values and goals that have emerged in different and contradictory sides of the country's historical lines of cleavage. The graphs below are an attempt to summarize the positive and negative views of the two dominant perspectives, along the axes of political legitimation (horizontal) and output (vertical).

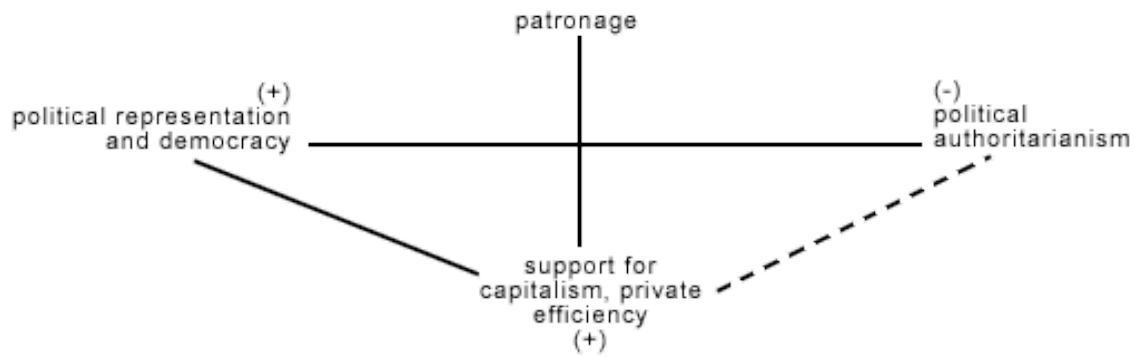
The whole political debate in Brazil - and this is not a Brazilian peculiarity - evolves about the alternative meanings of each extreme of the two diagrams, as indicated. Is the

banner of political representation a cover for a politics of private interests? Is a political discourse in terms of collective goals a justification for political authoritarianism? Are the efforts for central planning and efficiency nothing but covers for an old-fashioned politics of patronage?

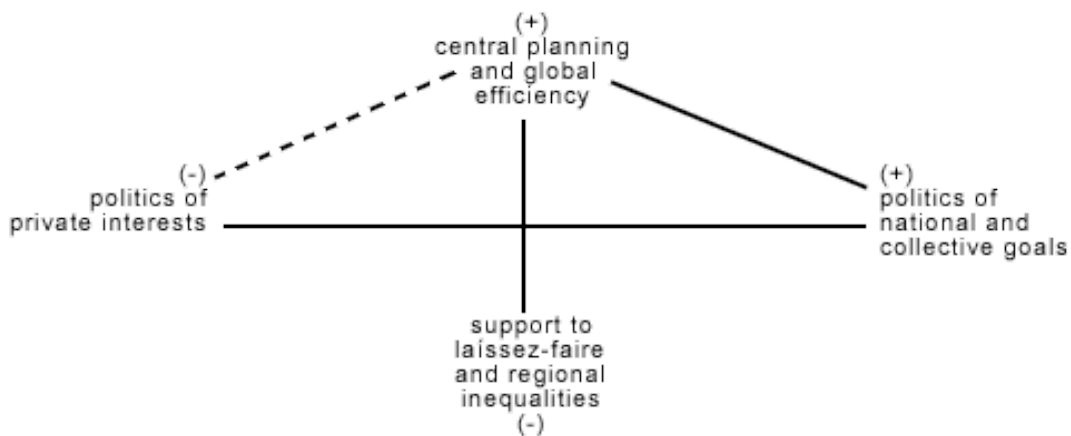
The political cleavage tends to appear in terms of a contradiction between two basically different combinations, "a" and "d". On one hand, classic representation politics and private efficiency; on the other, central planning and the search for collective goals. What is important about this political debate is not simply that perceptions and ideologies differ, but that both the positive and negative version of each item captures a significant aspect of reality. It is true that the Brazilian central state is historically the locus for political patronage and inefficiency, but it is also true that this is the place through which long-term goals of society can be achieved. It is true that the banner of political representation has been historically related to the politics of private interests - but it is also true that it has been a stronghold in the maintenance of basic values of freedom.

In a very schematic way, it is possible to say that there will be no workable solution for the reorganization of the country's political system while the historical cleavage between the liberal Paulista capitalism and the centralizing state remains. A closed political system that is ideologically committed with private capitalism can easily develop into a double-faced entity that proclaims to be doing "d" while actually implementing "c"⁸.

⁸ This double-faced aspect of the Brazilian political regime is well spelled out in Fernando Henrique Cardoso, "A Questão do Estado no Brasil" (mimeographed, forthcoming in *Dados*, 1974).



II - The interventionist, centralizing view:



The good combination - an efficient, far reaching, modern and responsive political state - can only start to emerge when political representation ceases to be the same as support to private interest groups, and, at the same time, when the state ceases to be a self-perpetuating and self-serving patrimonial bureaucracy and becomes an effective agency for the performance of collective goals.

This is where the issue of political integration reappears. The change from the negative to the positive signs in the diagrams above can only be performed if they get to coincide in space, that is, if they cease to respond to geographically differentiated cleavages. Or, in other words, if the process of central planning and coordination is sufficiently checked by political representation to avoid inefficiency and authoritarianism, and the organization of representational politics becomes sufficiently related to the common interests of society to prevail upon the logic of particularistic goals of the more privileged groups. There is

thus a double task to be performed through effective political integration: to transform the political structures and attitudes at both ends of the country's basic regional and ideological cleavages; to de-bureaucratize and de-patrimonialize the state and to de-privatize the politics of representation.